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TITLE: The Association Between Child and Adolescent Sexual Abuse History and Involvement in HIV Risk Behaviors in Adulthood in a Sample of 1490 Women

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BACKGROUND: Although previous studies have noted a relationship between history of early life sexual abuse and adulthood HIV-risky behaviors, it is unclear how the specific type of abuse and; age of onset; perpetrator's relationship to victim; and victims' response to the incidents affect later HIV risk. It was hypothesized here that child and/or adolescent sexual abuse history would be associated with adulthood HIV risk, but of particular interest was identification of the specific acts, perpetrators, duration age of onset, and victim response that was associated with adulthood HIV risk after adjusting for abuse in adulthood.

METHODS: Subjects were 1490 female sexual partners of male injection drug users who were participants in the NDA-supported Women Helping to Empower and Enhance Lives Project. Data were gathered via the Risk Behavior Assessment, which gathered information on lifetime/current drug use, and the Women's Supplement, which collected data on abuse perpetrators, nature and duration of the acts, and victim's response. 5 measures of adulthood HIV risk were examined: ever trading sex for money or for drugs; report of multiple sex partners in previous 30 days; never using condoms during vaginal sex in the previous 30 days; and use of drugs during sex in the 30 days. Logistic regression was used to determine variables independently related to these risk behaviors.

RESULTS: 39% of sample women were sexually abused before age 12; over 56% by age 18. As adults, 48% had been physically hurt by a sex partner and 35% had been raped or sexually assaulted by someone they did not consider a sex partner. In multivariate analysis, 40 years' duration of forced penetration by age 18, as well as well sexual assault in adulthood by someone not considered a sex partner, were strongly related to ever having traded sex for money in adulthood (ORs=6.11; 1.81, respectively); victimization by forced penetration by a family member during adolescence was strongly related (OR=8.12) to report multiple sex partners in the previous 30 days.

CONCLUSIONS: In this special population of women at high risk for HIV, victimization by acts of penetration by age 18 was independently associated with several HIV-risky adulthood behaviors. Service providers who can be expected to come into contact with women sex partners of men who inject drugs-e.g., drug treatment officials, nurses, AIDS counselor should consider adoption of screening for sexual abuse history as part of the intake process into care providing programs; hiring of staff who are trained in handling abuse-related issues; establishing victims' support groups; and provision of referral to specialized programs that offer treatment for abuse victims, including interventions specifically aimed at treating those abuse sequelae that may hinder adoption of HIV-preventive action.

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